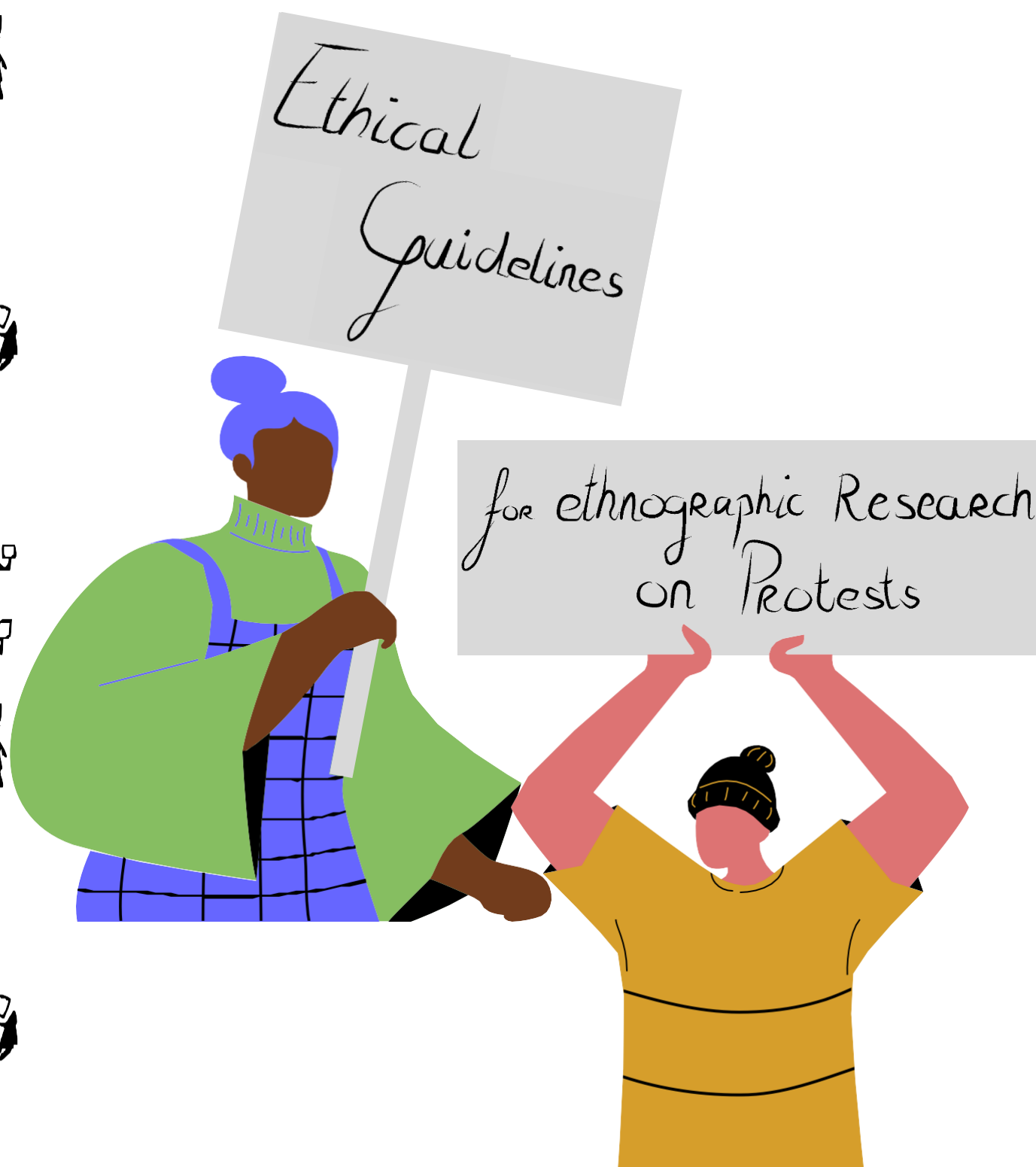


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Ethical Considerations



When conducting research on protests, one is bound to run into sensitive situations requiring ethical evaluation before proceeding. Before beginning, consider the following challenges specific to protest ethnography.

SENSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Maintaining relationships with informants in the protest context can be difficult given the often sensitive and polarizing nature of activism. It is an ethnographers' responsibility to be honest with their informants about their intentions and uphold any promises made which include putting significant effort towards protecting informants' identities during data collection and management.



SENSITIVE INFORMATION



After gaining access to activist groups, ethnographers are often privy to sensitive information and planning. In order to respect relationships with informants and protect them from possible hackers, take steps to encrypt and anonymize data during and after the note-taking process. More on this on page 3.

DEALING WITH THE STATE

Prior to beginning research surrounding political unrest or civil disobedience, it is vital to learn the rights and policies surrounding researchers in the chosen fieldsite. Knowledge of one's legal restraints is essential given that protests can become violent or result in mass arrests. Create a security plan to protect any data collected in the case of arrest or other potentially vulnerable situations.



PERSONAL SAFETY



Although most ethical considerations have to do with protecting the informants and validity of the research, it is also important to consider one's own safety, especially while conducting precarious fieldwork. Before entering the field, ensure an understanding of the dangers of participating in protests. [Here's a guide](#) on how to physically protect oneself.

DEALING WITH SURVEILLANCE



Surveillance has long been employed by authorities to monitor political dissent, especially among minorities (Cahn & Silver 2020). Today, using surveillance technologies during civil unrest is the norm, allowing police to track and record any suspicious activity (Guariglia 2020). It has never been more important for ethnographers to take the proper precautions to guard against potential data breaches and recorded imputable actions.

Gaining and Maintaining Access in activist groups

Gatekeepers

Your gatekeepers influence what informants you will have access to and how you will be perceived. It's important you build lasting relationships with them (McAuley 2020). Moreover, keep in mind the way you access a field should be considered ethical by the participants (Mutaru 2018).

..... Trust

Who introduces you to the field (McAuley 2020), your personal background and the institution you represent, the extent to which you are actively involved and take risks for the community you work with (Thomas-Hébert 2019) all influence how your informants trust you. Be aware of all these components while choosing how to approach the field.

Consent

Gaining consent from a representative of a group does not mean all the participants are informed and agree. It's important you consider informed consent as an ongoing process, reiterating your identity as a researcher whenever you engage in new relationships (Thomas-Hébert 2019). On the other hand, always be sure you can trust who you are revealing your identity to, as it might be a factor of risk (Thoma-Hébert 2019).

Protection of Informants

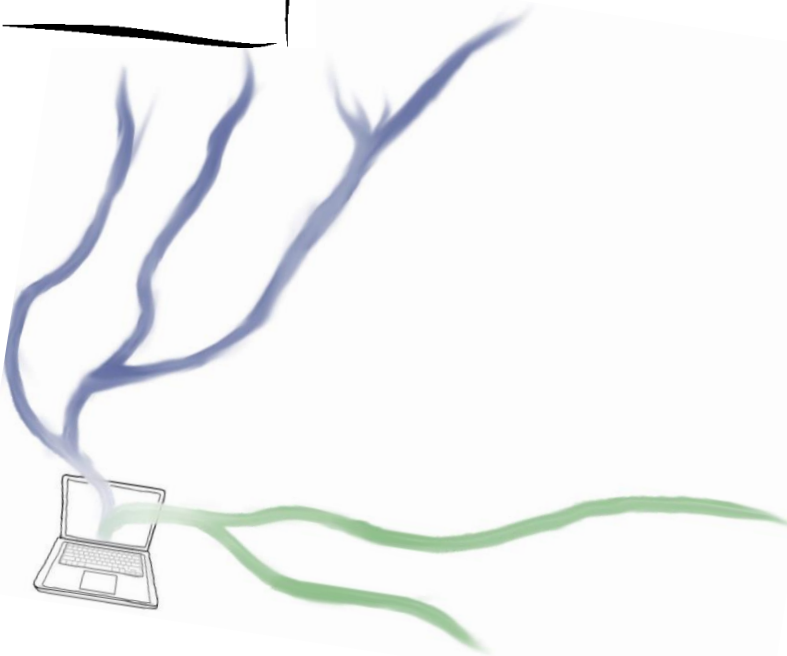
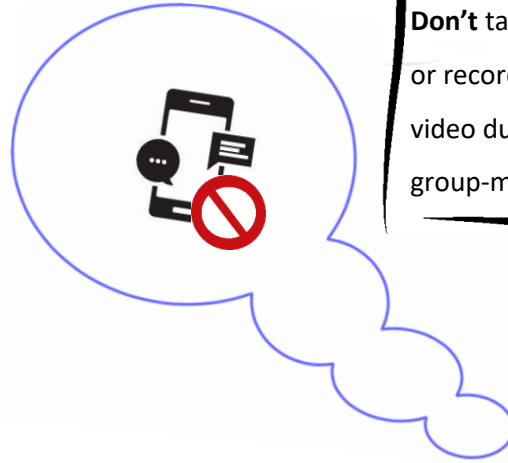
Anonymizing the identity of your informants is vital in ethnographic research, especially when it concerns delicate topics such as protesting. There are several ways of protecting your informants and the information that they provide you with:

Encrypt all your devices used to communicate with your informants.

You can make use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) for example, to encrypt and protect your internet traffic.

Code your informants' names in all your findings, including your fieldnotes.

Don't take any pictures or record anything on video during protests or group-meetings.

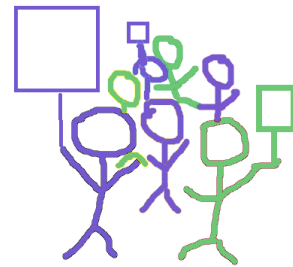


Refrain from technological means of communication, such as texting, during protests.

Telecommunications can possibly be monitored by phone trackers.

You can make use of encrypted email services, such as ProtonMail, which can be accessed through dedicated apps or the Tor network, which provides anonymous communication between you and your informants.

Self-Protection for Ethnographers



Before the Protest

Preparation is necessary – a researcher should have at least some knowledge about what form the protest takes, before joining one. Here are some tips on how to prepare yourself:

- Inform yourself about possible legal consequences beforehand
- Draw a clear line & sort your level of engagement
 - Non-violent vs violent groups → be aware of possible risks
 - Participant observation vs active participation → actively joining in chants and/or physical acts of protest will destroy neutrality & mark you as a protester
- Choose whether you want to give away your identity as a researcher → overt research is always recommended, as it is more ethical
- Seek approval from the people leading the protest → just like in other fieldwork sites, you must obtain consent first
- Control the info about you that is available → makes it harder to track you down, avoid signing petitions that mark you as picking a 'side'

During the Protest



As a researcher, one should draw as little attention to oneself as possible. This can be done as follows:

- Wear/be equipped with protective clothing → wear unspectacular, but suitable clothing (long sleeves and trousers)
- Stay neutral → do not wear politically charged clothing or badges
- Bring a mask and goggles in case police officers make use of tear gas and the like
- Stay away from photos and videos
- Refrain from carrying signs → makes you stand out
- Have a fully charged phone
- Switch phone to airplane mode and turn off Bluetooth and Wi-Fi (makes detection through surveillance devices harder)
- Carry necessary papers with you in case of police interrogation
- Do not disobey instructions from officials and the like
- Do not ask questions during live action → it's bad timing and won't carry fruits – instead, stick to observation and save interviewing for after the protest

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